Haldeman's Testimony Tape Conflict

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The tape transcripts released Monday by President Nixon of his June 23, 1972, conversations with former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman are in direct conflict with Haldeman's sworn testimony about those meetings before two Senate committees.

In summing up the June 23 meetings in May, 1973, testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that was investigating alleged CIA involvement in the Watergate affair, Haldeman testified under oath that:

"We had only very sketchy knowledge of what and who were involved in the Watergate affair. We had no reason to believe that anyone in the White House was involved and no reason, therefore, to seek any cover-up of the Watergate investigation from the White Houe."

At another point in testimony before the same panel, Haldeman said, "We did this in the full belief that we were acting in the national interest and with no intent or desire to impede or cover up any aspects of the Watergate investigation, itself."

Before the Senate Watergate committee, Haldeman described the President's concern over the possibility that the FBI investigation might uncover CIA operations and said that was why the President ordered him to contact the CIA. "I believe that the action I took with the CIA was proper, according to the President's instructions and clearly in the national interest," Haldeman told the Senate Watergate committee on July 30, 1973.

By contrast, the taped June 23, 1972 conversations show that Haldeman and the President discussed details of FBI information about the Watergate break-in and that the President approved Haldeman's suggestion that he call the CIA as part of a cover-up of the involvement of Nixon aides in the Watergate affair.

Willfully lying under oath before a Senate committee constitutes perjury, punishable by a jail term of up to five years and a $10,000 fine. Haldeman has not been charged with perjury in connection with his testimony about the meetings with the President, but does face three perjury counts in the Watergate cover-up case for his testimony before the Senate Watergate committee concerning the payment of alleged "hush money" to Watergate defendants.

The Watergate special prosecutor's office would not comment yesterday about the possibility of any future perjury charges being filed against Haldeman for his Senate testimony about the June 23 meeting. However, it is known the prosecutors re-examined the testimony after the President released the June 23 transcripts Monday.

In the first meeting of the day on June 23, Haldeman relayed to the President what he said was a suggestion from former White House counsel John W. Dean III and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell that the CIA be told to block an FBI investigation of the Watergate break-in.

It is clear throughout the transcript that Haldeman and the President were worried that the FBI would be able to trace funds to the Nixon re-election committee and to the involvement of Nixon campaign aides, rather than being concerned about any "national security" interests.

Once, early in the conversation, President Nixon mentioned that the investigation of former White House consultant and ex-CIA employee E. Howard Hunt in the Watergate case "will uncover a lot of things. You open that scab there's a hell of a lot of things and we feel that it would be very detrimental to have this thing go any further. This involves the Cubans, Hunt and a lot of hanky-panky that we have nothing to do with ourselves. . ."

Then, 10 pages later in the transcript, the President added, almost in passing, that Haldeman should tell the CIA: "Look, the problem is that this will open the whole, the whole Bay of Pigs thing and the President just feels that, ah, without going into the details —— don't, don't lie to them to the extent to say there is no involvement, but just say this is a comedy of errors, without getting into it, the President believes that it is going to open up the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again."

As a result of that meeting, with those two fleeting references to the CIA, Haldeman met with CIA officials with what he told the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee was a "five-fold" purpose:

"One, to ascertain whether there had been any CIA involvement in the Watergate affair;

"Two, to ascertain whether the relation between some of the Water-

gate participants and the Bay of Pigs was a matter of concern to CIA;

"Three, to inform the CIA of an FBI request for guidance regarding some aspects of the Watergate investigation because of the possibility of CIA involvement, directly or indirectly; I could interject there that this request had been made known by John Dean, counsel to the President, and had been transmitted by me to the President immediately upon being told of it by John Dean. The President, as a result of that, told me to meet with (CIA) Director (Richard) Helms and (CIA Deputy Director) General (Vernon) Walters and John Ehrlichman to get into this matter as I am laying it out here.

"The fourth purpose was to discuss White House concern regarding possible disclosure of non-Watergate-related covert CIA operations or other national security activities, not related to Watergate, that had been undertaken previously by some of the Watergate principles (sic).

"Fifth, to request General Walters to meet with acting Director Gray of the FBI to express these concerns and to coordinate with the FBI so that the FBI's area of investigation of the suspects, the Watergate suspects, not be expanded into unrelated matters which could lead to disclosure of their earlier national secuity and CIA activities."

Haldeman testified further that he did not recall any discussion at any time of a suggestion to involve the CIA in Watergate matter except as he described in his testimony.

"In summary, the meeting of June 23 with the CIA was held at the President's request in the interest of national security," Haldeman told the senators.

Haldeman testified in much the same way before the Senate Watergate committee. He referred the committee to the statement he had made before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee as one containing "considerable detail' 'on his account of the meeting with CIA officials and the reason for it.

In addition, he testified: ". . . the meeting, one of the purposes of the meeting, as assigned to me by the President on the morning of the 23d . . . in addition to ascertaining whether there was any CIA involvement, whether there was any CIA concern about earlier activities of people who had been arrested at Watergate, was to tell the CIA directors that the FBI had expressed concern that as to whether there was CIA involvement or any impingement."

Haldeman further testified that "the question raised was not solely the question of whether the CIA had been involved in the Watergate break-in but also whether the investigation of the Watergate break-in, which was to be thorough and total, could possibly impinge upon the activities totally unrelated to Watergate and related to national security and to covert CIA operations, the activities of some of the individuals who had also been involved in the Watergate and had been arrested at the Watergate."

Haldeman said before the Watergate committee he could not recall either the President or himself discussing the problem of a connection between the "Mexican money"—a campaign contribution that investigators traced to convicted Watergate burglar Bernard Barker's Miami bank account—and the CIA.

According to the June 23 tape transcript, however, the President and Haldeman specifically discussed that money in detail, and expressed their concern over it being traced to the campaign.